

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF FEBRUARY 17, 2015**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the February 17, 2015 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Frank Szeps, and Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor). Also present: Town Manager Guy Scaife, Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Services) and Various Seniors of R.H.

Those absent: Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Vargas asked if anyone from the public would like to speak. Melodie Perretto, 148 Raymond Road, R.H., said she is Chairman of the Senior Task Force. She thanked Town Manager Scaife, Lisa Zerio and her Senior Staff for projects being introduced pending the budget approval this May. Melodie Perretto said these projects include two shuffleboard courts, two bocce courts, designated walking trails on Town campus, directional signs, markers, benches, TV for bowling and a scroll for signs (in the area of the Nurse's Station). The Senior Affairs Committee is being asked to act as a liaison and to come up with a plan so that everyone is on the same page. The seniors are recommending that the title for this facility be Community Center with Senior Programs and she questioned if this is going to be renovated or built, etc. The seniors are hoping that this Committee will return with a plan of direction so that all of the seniors' energies will go in a positive direction and so that the community members are kept active, involved, as well as happy, because this is medically priceless.

Karen Plaza, Gilbert Avenue, R.H., said Town Manager Scaife had mentioned at this Committee's last meeting that 33% of the budget goes towards the seniors and she asked what the age breakout is. Town Manager Scaife believes that 55 years old (and older) is what the Staff had used. Karen Plaza said this adds a whole different dimension to the percentage being used because she thinks of seniors as being 65 years old and older. She also said Town Manager Scaife had mentioned that he thought a lot of people who attend the Town concerts are elderly but she sees a lot of younger people there. Karen Plaza then referred to how they are debating about whether they should do something different with the Senior Center or if they should build another one. A lot was mentioned in the one hundred and eighty-three surveys they received about how small the Senior Center is but she doesn't think that people who are fifty-five years old or older think that they are included in that. Those people won't be able to tell though that

this is being planned for them if they don't have access to that information. She thought Chairwoman Vargas was thinking that it was the responsibility of the people in the Senior Center to have filled out the survey. Karen Plaza said when she fills out a survey that she looks at it being for services rendered and she isn't looking at it as justifying the amount to add onto something so she thinks the word "survey" is confusing. There might be two possibilities of what they can do. She came from a business environment where 6' X 6' cubicles were standard for the employees. The floor space in this Town Hall is huge so she said one possibility might be that they can move employees from downstairs to upstairs. There is a tremendous amount of space between each desk in Town Manager Scaife's area. She also thinks that they have to look at this as a Community Center and not just for seniors. The Town facilities could be moved upstairs so that the downstairs can be used as the Senior Community Center. She told them the other possibility is having an open house so that the Townspeople can see how much space is allocated to the seniors and see if it is justifiable.

Toni Palazzolo said at a meeting that she had been at last week, it was mentioned about having shuffleboards and benches, etc., which she thinks would be a nice community atmosphere, but she thought about how the playground on the Town campus gets used a lot. She asked if they know where the shuffleboards, etc. would be put and she asked if a study was done. Town Manager Scaife said Lisa Zerio could answer this because she had done the study on this. Chairwoman Vargas told the seniors that what they were talking about hasn't been shared with this Committee yet by Town Manager Scaife and they were waiting to hear his presentation this evening. Lisa Zerio said there is a small playground that has been there forever. The Town's Kids' Corner Program, as well as the nursery that is across the street, use this. They can revamp that area because there is enough space there so that there can be an area for play and an area for bocce, etc. for the seniors.

3. APPROVAL OF LAST MONTH'S MEETING MINUTES

Councilor Szeps made a motion to approve the Minutes of the December 15, 2014 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

4. FOLLOW-UP PRESENTATION BY TOWN MANAGER

Town Manager Scaife said he appreciates people coming forward with suggestions. He referred to the comment that had been made about space and it will certainly be looked at. An in-depth study had been done on space back in the timeframe of November/December 2014. He agrees that there is some excess space upstairs at the Town Hall according to the way the building was laid out and the challenge is to undo this. There is inadequate space to have an entire department moved though. A little space might be saved downstairs but a dysfunction would be created within the organization. He also said that there are only certain modifications that could be done because of the support structure so an Engineering Staff would have to be brought in.

Town Manager Scaife did his PowerPoint presentation at this point. (Please see the Attachment.) After the presentation, he said that he had a very healthy discussion with John Bedlack (resident who lives at 7 Murphy Drive, R.H.). Town Manager Scaife encouraged any senior to stop by to

see him or to schedule a meeting with him if they have any input or concerns so that they can have a dialogue. Something is going to be done ultimately and decisions are going to be made. They can't have ten different opinions though and no consensus because that will make this more challenging. This ought to start with this Committee, the Senior Task Force or some hybrid of that. The feedback will then go to this Committee overtime and then to the Town Council ultimately. Once they map out what a reasonable schedule is, they can start deciding what they can do in the short term towards a long term plan.

5. OTHER; DISCUSSION

Chairwoman Vargas asked if there were any comments or questions based on the presentation. John Bedlack thanked Town Manager Scaife and Lisa Zerio for doing a really good job and he learned a lot in the past four to five weeks. John Bedlack said what he is seeing as an outsider is that there is a breakdown in communication. He said Lisa Zerio and Town Manager Scaife found some short term goals within a month of him talking to Town Manager Scaife. John Bedlack thinks they can do a lot if they improve the communications. They have a crisis coming because they have thousands and thousands of people entering this age group and the Country is used to spending the bulk of its money on education but the needs are switching all of a sudden. He thinks the Senior Task Force has to come up with some short term goals, as well as medium and long term ones. The buying of property and putting a building on it would be a long term goal obviously. He thinks a concern from listening to some people who he has talked to and who have been coming here is that the long term goal keeps getting pushed further and further out. He is going to try to get some of the things put on paper to give to this Committee so that they can make decisions. There is \$18,000 that is pending budget approval for material and in-house labor for the bocce courts and shuffleboard courts, etc., which he considers a short term goal. The seniors will have to come back to this Committee with some medium goals and long term ones to ask them to give these to the full Town Council. He hopes the dialogue, which has been great last month, continues. He told the members of this Committee that they are the advocates and he hopes they will tell the Town Council how important it is to recognize the needs of the community.

Chairwoman Vargas asked if anyone else in the audience had any comments and no one did. She turned to Councilor Kochanek. Councilor Kochanek said a lot had been said this evening. He agrees with John Bedlack about how long term goals and short term ones are needed but he said that eight years is an awful long time for the people who were in this room to wait for something to happen. Councilor Kochanek knows it takes forever for a government to move someplace but if they are creative and feel strongly enough about something, there are ways and means to move something along a lot quicker than three years. He referred to the three options of expanding, constructing or redoing that are on the table now. His opinion is that they sometimes have to give up the "feel good" feeling of studying something if there is a potential crisis coming down the road and they have to just go with an intelligent decision to start moving forward on it.

Councilor Szeps thinks Town Manager Scaife's presentation clearly recognizes the items that are going to have to be addressed and he said more importantly, the document itself and the actions of this Committee have established an outlined direction that they need to go in. It is just a

matter of whether the people of Rocky Hill, this Committee and the Town Council want to support these activities. This Committee will keep working towards that goal. He thanked Town Manager Scaife for bringing this information forward and he is sure that more information will be gathered in the future to base their decisions on. Councilor Kochanek also thanked Town Manager Scaife for bringing the information this evening but he was trying to make the point that any inaction for a long period of time won't do them any good.

Chairwoman Vargas said as a follow-up from this Committee's previous meeting that Town Manager Scaife came up with some short term goals that will be put into the budget. Chairwoman Vargas said she had also mentioned to Lisa Zerio about seeing what the status would be for working with local businesses to provide certain activities that the Town Hall doesn't have space for. Lisa Zerio said she has been meeting with Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester. They will be reaching out to some billiard halls, etc. in this Town. They will also be helping out the businesses by bringing them in for them to make money (i.e. having discounted rates for the seniors at fitness clubs). There is also a warm water pool at the Sheraton so Cathy Sylvester will be meeting with them to see if warm water exercises can be brought back like they used to have when that was the Marriott. They will also be looking at the existing rooms for a short term focus. Hopefully for next month, they will have an update on what they are working on. Chairwoman Vargas thinks this is an excellent avenue that they need to explore this and she thinks it is great for them to help the local businesses out.

Chairwoman Vargas referred to John Bedlack's comment about this Committee being the advocate for the seniors at the Town Council level and she is with him 110%. Chairwoman Vargas said this is one of the reasons that she was behind the survey. This Committee can't go to the Town Council without having any kind of statistics, etc. with regards to them wanting a Community Center for \$6,000,000. The information that Town Manager Scaife has been giving in reports to them and the comparing of Rocky Hill to other Towns is all important information that the Councilors can bring back to the Council table. Chairwoman Vargas thinks it will be easier to sell something if a logical explanation is presented to a group of people compared to an emotional plea. She thinks it is excellent what Town Manager Scaife has been doing. Chairwoman Vargas told Melodie Perretto that she got her message when she came forward at the beginning of this meeting about how she is coming to this Committee for them to make a decision. Chairwoman Vargas thinks she will throw this back at the Senior Task Force based on the questions that Town Manager Scaife put out. Chairwoman Vargas asked the seniors to get together as a group over the next couple of months to answer the proposed questions in Town Manager Scaife's presentation and they can then come back to present to this Committee the short term, medium term and long term goals because that will make this Committee's job that much easier. They could do this with John Bedlack's help maybe so he could give them a focus with regards to the goals.

Melodie Perretto said from listening to this discussion that they should have had an open house before they did the survey because a lot of the younger seniors aren't aware about what is available at the Senior Center. This way they wouldn't have the question about people not knowing that there is a Senior Center and this would have started the dialogue as to what is going on, etc. She mentioned that she had read about how Glastonbury had an open house at their Senior Center. The Senior Task Force will answer the questions (Town Manager Scaife's

proposed ones) but she said they need to get to the public to get their interest. Melodie Perretto said maybe they could have an open house for a couple of hours in the evening where they can have different speakers. It is a shame to her that people don't know about the clubs, etc. at the Senior Center because they are paying taxes but they don't even know what is available.

Chairwoman Vargas thinks an open house that leads to a public hearing would be part of the process down the road but she thinks the Senior Task Force has to come to this Committee first. She mentioned that some people might not want to come to the Community Center to participate in the clubs but they might want to take advantage of other things (i.e. getting their blood pressure checked). She told the Senior Task Force to look at the big picture when they are answering the questions. They want to make sure that the Town has the opportunity to provide other services that people need besides socialization. Melodie Perretto agrees 100%.

Councilor Kochanek asked if the services ever appear in the *Rare Reminder* because that is very civic minded. It also goes out to everybody and most people read it. He thinks the *Rare Reminder* could be approached once a month to have the available services and clubs listed in it with the days of those, along with phone numbers to call for information, because this might generate some interest for the people. He agrees that the general population of the Town isn't met when things are published but the *Rare Reminder* generates a lot of interest. They could do this before they have an open house. Chairwoman Vargas thinks this would be another short term goal that wouldn't cost a lot of money.

Chairwoman Vargas asked the Senior Task Force to look at Town Manager Scaife's questions and to answer them. They could even call him or ask him to attend their meeting. Chairwoman Vargas proposed that the Senior Affairs Committee meet again in April 2015 so that the Senior Task Force will have a couple of months to fine tune things and come up with short term, medium term and long term goals. Lisa Zerio and her Staff will then be able to come back with regards to them using Town businesses to provide other services on a short term basis.

Chairwoman Vargas said the Councilors on the Senior Affairs Committee are the seniors' voices for the Town Council. Statistics and facts will help her to support her argument at the Town Council level.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:57 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Kochanek and adopted unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary